

Tree Profile: *Leptospermum Species* - Tea Tree

General information: The genus *Leptospermum* (Tea Tree) is represented by over 80 species in Australia, with a handful occurring in New Guinea, Indonesia and Borneo. Tea trees have a wide range in Australia, occurring from tropical to cool temperate zones, and from rain forests to the semi- and arid areas. They have generally very striking bark, often flakey, papery or fibrous. The trunk often has a ropey appearance. Generally small leaves and flowers followed by woody seed capsules.

Position: Full sun is preferred, but will grow in partial shade but ramification may be more difficult.

Watering: Keep moist all the time. Lack of water is a death sentence - they can go from healthy to dead in a matter of hours! NO wet feet, because of root rot!

Feeding: Normal fertilizing regime.

Repotting: Best during the hot weather when they are growing strongly, use free draining mix. Depending on variety, they can dislike extensive root pruning - do as little as possible and only reduce the root ball over time on established trees. Best to arrange a radial root spread when they are young and vigorous. When growing from young stock, pot them up frequently to encourage rapid growth.

Pruning & Wiring: Keep pinching new shoots back to shape the tree, can bud back on old wood but best to only cut back to green growth. Repotting, pruning and wiring should be done at different times, or the tree will be over-stressed. Responds well to wiring and branches set quickly - any wire marks are generally grown over quickly due to the flakey bark.

Propagation: Most tea trees grow easily from cuttings - keep them moist. Also easily grown from seed - collect unopened seed capsule from the tree and store in a closed paper or plastic bag or any other closed container. When the capsules dry out, the very fine seeds are released - give the bag or container a vigorous shake to encourage release! Sprinkle the seed on a tray of seed raising mix and keep moist. When the seedlings are about 1cm tall, carefully transplant them into tubes or small pots.

Pests and diseases: The main problem on tea trees is webbing caterpillars - small caterpillars which form a dense mass of fibrous webs containing dead leaves and waste products. Easily seen if vigilant - spray with pyrethrum, and then manually remove webs with fingers or tweezers. Sooty mould has also been experienced - treat with fungicide or other commercial product.

Styles: Most styles including - Informal Upright, Slanting, Semi-cascade and Shohin and Mame.

Species suitable for bonsai:

Leptospermum laevigatum, commonly known as the Coastal Tea Tree. Rough, twisted bark and white flowers.

Leptospermum scoparium, and various crosses which have been commercialized as Mesmeryes, Merindi, etc. Range from small to medium pink and red flowers

Leptospermum lanigerum, commonly known as the Woolly Tea Tree. Fine silky hair on branches, leaves and seed capsules. White flowers.

Leptospermum macrocarpum, rough bark and white, pink or red flowers.

Leptospermum petersonii, commonly known as the Lemon-scented Tea Tree. White flowers, native to Eastern Australia, lance-shaped leaves.

Leptospermum liversidgei, also commonly known as lemon-scented tea-tree, olive tea tree, or lemon tea tree, is a shrub to 4 m found naturally growing in wet coastal heath in Eastern Australia.

